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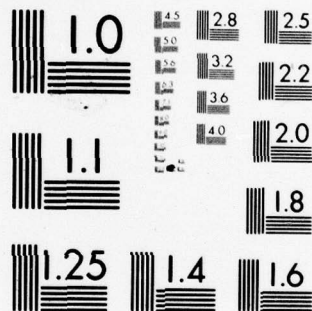
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6 DEVELOPING BETTER SPECIALISTS AND EXECUTIVES -- AGAIN??

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Obstacles to the Implementation of Personnel Reforms

in the State Department

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Brookings Institution

11 Aug 1976

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"The studies have agreed that the career Foreign Service must give greater scope and meaning to specialization on the one hand and to a growing need for managerial and executive talent on the other."

Arthur G. Jones, summarizing studies conducted between 1945 and 1960

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"...we do not need more broad-gauged studies for the time being.... The need is not for more studies of this type but rather to implement the ones we have."

William B. Macomber, January 1970

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## Preface

This paper is the final product of a study requested by the State Department on problems of implementing personnel reforms.

The timing and subject matter of this study were determined by the State Department. In February 1976, the Department established a Professional Development Review Group and a Professional Development Working Group to arrive at recommendations to strengthen the Department's programs for developing specialized expertise and senior executive talent within career service ranks, and for improving manpower planning. One of the first conclusions reached as they began their work was that many previous reforms directed toward the same goals had been incompletely implemented. Thus there was hope that an outsider's investigation of some of the reasons why, conducted while the internal groups were developing their current recommendations, might contribute to making these recommendations effective.

The research actually conducted and the conclusions reached were entirely the responsibility of the author, the product of a concentrated effort in May and June and some more relaxed revision of the paper thereafter. There were three major sources. The first was 25 interviews (or extended conversations) with officials involved in or affected by current and previous reform efforts. Eight interviews covered the Macomber period and the years immediately thereafter; thirteen were with officials involved in current professional development issues (including three bureau executive directors); four dealt with both Macomber and current experience. Twenty-four were with State Department officials one with an international staff member of the Office of Management and Budget. A second major source was unclassified State Department files on personnel reform efforts, particularly those since the Herter Committee; I am particularly grateful to Evelyn Manning of the Personnel Records Management and Research Division of the Bureau of Personnel, for locating materials relevant to my interest and making them available to me, and to Frances Bourne for authorizing such access. My third major source was previous analyses of State Department personnel reform efforts, which are cited in footnotes as appropriate.



I am grateful to Plo D. Uliassi, Senior Program Officer in the Office of External Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, for his key role in organizing this project, and to him and Adrian Basora, Staff Director of the Professional Development Working Group, for their support and assistance throughout. I also benefited from useful critical comment on earlier draft by a number of departmental officials -- conveyed directly to me and also during a research review seminar held at the Department in July -- as well as from comments by several outside experts.

Without the help of all these people, and without the cooperation of the Brookings Institution in granting leave, it would have been impossible to complete this undertaking in so brief a period of time. Responsibility for the final result, of course, remains with the author.

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Developing Better Executives and Specialists--AGAIN??

Obstacles to the Implementation of Personnel Reforms

in the State Department

I. M. Destler

No theme in the William Macomber's Management Reform Program received greater attention than "the development of top managers."<sup>1</sup> This goal was stressed in the Deputy Under Secretary's January 1970 address launching the program, and in Diplomacy for the Seventies published eleven months later. Numerous specific recommendations "approved for implementation" in December 1970 had the "development of executive and managerial talents" as their prime objective.<sup>2</sup> In February 1971, the Office of Career Counseling and Assignments submitted a five-page implementation report on nine of these, stressing that a "central effort" ... will be the selection and development of officers who demonstrate the potential to assume program direction responsibility in the Department and abroad." The following November, a follow-up report used almost identical language, one of the main changes being the substitution of the present for the future tense.<sup>3</sup> But four years later, in the same week that the Secretary of State was establishing a new Board of Professional Development,<sup>4</sup> the Murphy Commission found an unmet need for a strong departmental executive development program "to produce the pool of career executives" required for State's "policy leadership role."<sup>5</sup>

The Macomber reforms had been approved and, on the record, implemented. Yet little, in practice, appears to have changed. Nor was exactly a new phenomenon.

In 1954 the Wriston Committee urged that the Department "develop a career management program, providing sequences of training and operational assignments," an effort that was, according to one careful and sympathetic

analyst, "less than a resounding success."<sup>6</sup>

The Herter Committee report of 1962 placed particular emphasis on making development of "executive ability" a prime goal of the personnel system. Defining such ability as a "combination of an appreciation of higher policy considerations and an ability to use the practical tools of management," the Committee found that the "traditional career system for Foreign Service Officers . . . is inadequate . . . to develop some of the qualities needed. The favorite route to the top in the Foreign Service has been political work; yet most activity within this field is singularly devoid of supervisory or managerial responsibilities." To remedy this situation, the Committee urged "comprehensive career development programs" carried on by "strengthened" career development units in State, as well as AID in USIA. And "selection into" the "expert and command level" (classes 2 and above) should, the Committee said, be limited to officers "who have evidenced a capacity for executive leadership or who have outstanding competence in a professional field."<sup>7</sup>

And the strong emphasis that Macomber gave to "management" was foreshadowed also by one of his more controversial predecessors, William Crockett, who pressed the "development of managers as leaders" in his management program, urging among other things the decentralizing of authority to force assumption of responsibility, and putting forward plans to "staff all DCM positions with executive 'comers'."<sup>8</sup>

When one turns to the subject of the development of specialists, one finds a similar echoing of recommendations over time, though more apparent progress toward their implementation. The Wriston Committee report of 1954, for example, includes the following passages:

The Foreign Service Officer Corps has developed on the 19th century theory or philosophy that diplomacy is fundamentally a field for "generalists." . . . That idea . . . is not well adapted to the diplomacy of a power that has become not only the political, but also the economic and military, leader of the Free World. . . .

Banks and industrial firms and commercial firms used to develop "generalists" for top management post by moving promising talent through different departments. . . . That practice, however, has been all but abandoned by large-scale private enterprise. . . . Prevailing management practice today emphasizes the development of an individual



around his speciality, with generalism coming later as he approaches full maturity. . . .

The revolutionary change in the position of the United States, with consequent expansion of its personnel needs for the fulfillment of its international mission, has placed a premium upon individuals with a high degree of specialization in economics, commercial promotion, agricultural knowledge, labor competence, fiscal practice, certain branches of the law, and the languages and cultures of important areas of the world. . . . The Foreign Service has been almost indifferent to these specialties; it has loath to make room for them in its ranks . . .

The prime Wriston recommendation was that the Service "open its ranks to a large number of people with a high degree of specialization in other than the general practice of diplomacy," through its amalgamation with "home" (State Department) service staffs.<sup>10</sup> The Wriston Committee also called for "a clear definition of various types of functional competence required both at home and abroad -- something that does not now exist -- and the continuous projection ahead of officer needs." Careers, it emphasized, "will tend to center upon . . . specialties."<sup>11</sup> The Herter Committee further developed many of these themes, seeing a need for a foreign affairs personnel system to develop and deploy a variety of "specialized competences;" and urging the development of "a series of flexible career lines representing all major professional fields." It urged greater attention to "specialized education and experience" in recruitment at lower levels, and the supplementation of this with "a positive program" of lateral entry at the intermediate and higher levels, "particularly to meet specialized needs."<sup>12</sup> Macomber's address of January 1970 launching his reform program echoed these reports by declaring that "the age of the specialist is here," and his task forces generally supported this emphasis.<sup>13</sup> And substantial progress has in fact been made in both legitimizing and strengthening functional expertise at State, particularly in economic policy areas. Nonetheless, the Murphy Commission was able to conclude in 1975 that "the major personnel problem facing the Department" is the need for "expertise and continuity of

the Washington staff," the "functional competence and bureaucratic skill to play an effective role . . . in complex fields of trade and investment, international monetary matters, food production, energy, deep ocean rights, environment, military and arms control policy, technology exchanges, etc."<sup>14</sup>

Why is progress so slow, and accomplishment so incomplete? Why the gap between the continuing emphases of both external study reports and internal reform programs, and actual State Department practice? The general thrust of this paper is that implementation of State Department personnel reform efforts tends to fail because people don't pay enough attention to it early enough in the reform process. Personnel reform efforts, of course, fail for many other reasons -- disinterest among top political officials (Herter); Congressional inaction on needed legislation (the Hays bill); resistance within foreign service (the Crockett program); competing time pressures on senior management officials (like the heavy demand for labor-management consultations in the latter Macomber period). But the most persistent, neglected cause of failure has been inadequate and belated attention to how reforms will get implemented.

What are some of the patterns this neglect takes? Six examples highlight some major aspects of the problem.

#### Some Forms and Causes of Implementation Failure

1) When leaders have not placed in key implementing positions people who are committed to the content and spirit of reforms. The major Wriston recommendation, a one-time amalgamation of the foreign and departmental services, was unusually susceptible to implementation through executive fiat determinedly enforced, but neither the Committee nor the Secretary of State took any chances. Even as the report was being completed and before it was issued, Committee member Charles Saltzman was moving into the special post of Under Secretary for Administration, created to implement the reforms. And though Saltzman



held this post for only seven months, he was succeeded by Deputy Under Secretary Loy Henderson, who was also committed to Wristonization, and who stayed on for six years.<sup>15</sup>

The Macomber program had the advantage that the sponsor of the reforms was already in the senior responsible position for implementing them. But he inaugurated the massive task force without having a Director General or Deputy strongly engaged in and committed to the reform process, even though it was people working under them who would shoulder the burden of carrying it out. Nor were those appointed to succeed them in 1971 so engaged. In fact, this study failed to uncover a single example of an individual given an operational personnel assignment at any level because he was sympathetic to the Macomber program and committed to use his new position to implement it.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the mixed reception accorded the Herter Committee Report was partly due to the non-engagement of those holding key positions when it was delivered. When the Committee was being set up, the enterprise had sympathizers in key places -- Chester Bowles as Under Secretary, Roger Jones as Deputy Under Secretary for Administration. By the time the study was completed, both had moved to other posts.<sup>17</sup>

2) When reformers base their implementation strategy on a proposal that Department leaders are not ready to accept. The Herter Committee did concern itself with implementation in its brilliant, comprehensive Personnel for the New Diplomacy. But it structured the whole report around establishing a new "Number Three" State official, an Executive Under Secretary, a proposal which Rusk opposed and effectively "tabled" a month after the study came out. The Committee apparently did not take advance soundings on the proposal, and was unaware of Rusk's opposition. But this setback contributed to the departmental decision to concentrate first on implementing those Herter proposals not requiring legislation, which were generally among the less important ones.<sup>18</sup>

3) When officials responsible for execution "implement" a reform by making a change similar in label but different in purpose, content, and impact. Macomber Task Force I proposed centralized control of assignments as a means to several ends, including "specialization" and

"development of managers."<sup>19</sup> And one of the first Management Reform Bulletins announced "centralization and reorganization of personnel programs," particularly counseling and assignments, under the Director General and PER.<sup>20</sup> In fact, however, the form of this restructuring reflected not Task Force I's goals but those of Director General John Burns, particularly his determination to establish close personal relationships between individual FSOs and class counseling officers. The way Burns wanted to recentralize assignments was opposed as unworkable not only by those identified with Macomber but also by key people within his own shop, including the official who would have direct responsibility for running the new system. But when Burns persisted Macomber assented, perhaps to retain Burns' general -- if passive -- support for the reform program. The system did prove ineffective, and was revamped within eighteen months. In the meantime, the ostensible aims of the change were frustrated. A July 1971 staff memo to Macomber about monitoring progress under Management Reform Bulletins said of this one: "A more definite statement of objectives and goals is required if an objective evaluation of the new organization is to be made."

4) When insufficient attention is paid to the impact of reforms on the legitimate interests of other departmental bureaus for which PER provides service. PER is properly considered the central focal point for the development and allocation of the department's human resources; its authority has recently and rightly been strengthened to serve these ends. But it is also a service organization which must be responsive to the manpower needs of the bureaus which perform the department's substantive, administrative, and consular business. Any movement of power away from the bureaus is bound to meet resistance and thus requires strong Seventh Floor support; but such support is unlikely to continue indefinitely unless the bureaus' interests are handled in a way which makes them able to "live with" a new system, that limits the number of appeals made.



The Macomber and earlier reports say little, however, about the politics of the assignment process; one finds instead rather idealized formulations of the general benefits that centralization will bring in terms of rational resource allocation and development of talent. There was also this flavor in Secretary Kissinger's June 1975 speech--"bargaining" over assignments was neither "rational" nor consistent with "service-wide" interests, and steps were being taken to curtail it.<sup>21</sup> Staff analyses supporting the 1975 assignment reforms have a more realistic flavor; they recognize at least tacitly that assignments will inevitably involve bargaining, and seek ways to curb particular sources of bureau leverage. But were the new system not managed with sufficient sensitivity to bureau interests, it would almost certainly be unable to endure. Interviews with several officials indicated, in fact, a widespread feeling that the new central authority was sometimes being wielded too arbitrarily.<sup>22</sup> Apparently this problem has been recognized and remedial action is being taken, including changes in personnel.

5) When officials who affect implementation come to believe that reform sponsors are as interested in the appearance of change as in actual system impact, and when these officials are thus able to substitute formal compliance for serious, carefully-monitored efforts to change actual personnel operations. To be taken seriously, reformers need to establish an overall impression of forward movement: that the future is on their side, that they are making progress on the problems which they have tackled. Thus one should not simply write off the "public relations" of reform efforts, for it may be indispensable to their ultimate success. PR has its dangers, though, particularly if--as in the Macomber case once the Task Force reports were completed -- an enormous range of problems is being tackled by a diminishing number of persons committed to the program, most of them engaged only part-time. To keep the momentum going, and to demonstrate action across the broad range of matters the Task Force treated, officials were

almost inevitably driven to seek some degree of compliance with as large a number of specific proposals as possible. Purpose and priorities were driven out by pressure for maximum paper compliance; modest steps forward were billed as major reform successes. This was not without short-run attractions for both sides -- reformers got their day in the sun, resisters could reassure themselves that little was really changing. But the credibility of reform efforts was eroded, and the prospects for real change over the long run were undercut, particularly since no general system was established to monitor and evaluate what changes in operations were actually taking place.

6) When a reform proposal, even if concrete and implementable separately, must be integrated with a range of related actions if its purposes are to be achieved. In the Macomber program, at least three separate working groups devoted enormous effort to reshaping the standard performance evaluation form; the decision was made to complete this by summer 1971.<sup>23</sup> It finally was reshaped in the direction sought, in time for summer 1974!<sup>24</sup> One reason for the delay was turnover in the PE division. Another was what plagued the program throughout -- that the reformers and PER were operating on different wave lengths. Reformers wanted to improve supervisory practice and rewards for management skills by having evaluations based not on abstract personal qualities but concrete performance goals established collaboratively by rater and ratee. The PE division was somewhat skeptical about this approach and proposals to test it. But more important was the fact that they saw it as a diversion from their real day-to-day, operational jobs -- managing selection boards; making sure that some PE form got to the field in time for the upcoming evaluation cycle. Other sections of PER seem to have viewed reform program burdens similarly -- as unwanted, additional levies on their time, when the day was already not long enough for what they considered their prime responsibilities.

Still another reason for the delay, however, was that as reformers

pursued the matter further, they became less sure that written forms could be brought to yield useful evaluations of performance and potential however they were designed. They became attracted to alternative approaches like assessment centers, which in turn needed to be developed in relation to other reform initiatives like the senior threshold (careful review before promotion to Class 2) also endorsed by the Macomber program (and also, in somewhat different form, by the Herter Committee before it and the Murphy Commission afterward). But to move in a coordinated way on all of these fronts would have required a group of people, analysts and operators, working together on these efforts for a substantial period of time. Instead, much of the burden for Macomber implementation fell on one official formally serving as Special Assistant to the Director General but actually working as Macomber's personnel reform staff aide. As his year in this position moved toward its conclusion, as it became obvious that reform momentum was waning and that PER was not picking up too many of the balls, prospects for a truly sustained, comprehensive effort evaporated.

#### Some Related Obstacles to Reform

These six selected forms of implementation failure differ in their specifics but have one broad thing in common. In each case the operating system on hand to carry out the reforms once decided upon proved incompatible with the achievement of the reforms. And in most cases, earlier attention to implementation might have encouraged remedial action in advance -- either to change the people and restructure the institutions, expanding the system's capacity to implement reforms; or to trim reform objectives to fit more nearly the existing capacity.

These examples also suggest why implementing institutions and offices have so much impact on how reforms actually come out, notwithstanding their formal role of simply carrying out decisions previously arrived at. Development of executives and specialists is the product of thousands of discretionary decisions over a period of years. It cannot be brought about simply by Seventh Floor action memoranda or a set of directives and guidelines; it requires changes in institutional



processes, particularly assignments, which affect these discretionary decisions, and attention over time to the competing departmental interests and purposes which such processes serve. To reshape such processes requires not just clarity of purpose and not just support from the political leadership -- these are usually necessary, but seldom sufficient. It requires also very careful attention to execution, to implementation strategy, to engaging the constructive involvement of the individuals and offices that will be making or influencing those discretionary decisions, to making professional development goals their goals. But the Macomber program, like most major postwar personnel reform efforts, was pursued in a way that made sustained attention to the details of implementation all but impossible.

Enormous attention was paid to deciding what new systems should be established; the practical problems of getting from here to there were addressed too little and too late. Major stress was placed on involving the career service in development of the program and also -- to the extent feasible -- on involving and committing the department's political leadership. But to PER, Diplomacy for the Seventies was, for the most part, "reform from without."<sup>25</sup>

On issues where controlling central decisions and actions could be taken, however, the Macomber program was somewhat more effective. There was substantial impact on recruitment, building on changes already under way -- the standard brochure was rewritten to stress functional specialization along "cone" lines -- administrative, consular, economic, political. The upper age limit for appointment at the bottom was raised from thirty-one to fifty-four to open the Foreign Service to more persons with extensive prior experience. The written examination was revised. All of this could be accomplished by one-shot decisions. However, the impact of the reforms on how entry oral examinations were conducted was apparently and understandably more limited; the tendency of officers to "reproduce themselves" in those they admitted was perhaps modified but assuredly not eliminated.

Similarly, initial implementation proceeded smoothly on Task Force III's proposal that departmental employees be brought gradually and voluntarily into a single unified foreign service personnel system. Here guidelines could be, and were, quickly drafted for granting foreign service career status (FSRU) to officials in operating specialities generally outside the FSO corps, and applications could be handled straightforwardly according to the guidelines. The FAS (Foreign Affairs Specialist) corps was established in a February 1971 Management Reform Bulletin (No. 8). Moreover, relations between the proposers and the implementers of this program were apparently good. The PER official responsible reportedly took the initiative in engaging the continued cooperation of the Task Force Chairman; the program announced was essentially what the Task Force proposed, with one highly consequential exception. The Task Force believed that direct conversion of GS employees to Foreign Service status was not authorized by current statute, but Macomber decided that it was. The American Federation of Government Employees sued, leading to a temporary injunction which halted all conversions to career status from August 1971 to July 1972, and a final court decision in mid-1973 that it was indeed illegal to give permanent FSRU status to those who had not been in temporary FSR status for three years. (More recently, departmental personnel policy has turned away from the goal of a unified personnel system where all career employees are under the authority of Foreign Service Act.)

Similarly, the Macomber training recommendations had an impact where they urged new courses or course emphases at FSI -- in management, for example. The two prime proposals, however, were generally not implemented. The call for a substantial expansion of the training budget was a casualty to general fiscal tightness. And what Task Force IV emphasized even more --remedying the "haphazard, inefficient, and too often casual impact" of training "on employee career patterns"<sup>26</sup> -- went

generally unimplemented because, as noted, the reforms generally did not penetrate deeply enough into the way that assignments were handled day by day.

Implementation was also predictably more difficult when a course of action seemed to threaten deeply held values, or strong interests, within the foreign service. Entry of persons outside the government into the service at middle grades was an early casualty, notwithstanding recommendations of at least three task forces for "more extensive use of lateral entry as a means of infusing new blood,"<sup>27</sup> and a Management Reform Bulletin on January 8, 1971 (No. 4) announcing a "positive lateral entry program" with a "possible maximum target" of about 50 officers a year. Implementation was delayed partly because of a general executive branch freeze on new outside hiring, but more importantly because it became clear -- from promotion projections developed in the Macomber implementation process -- just how slowly advancement was likely to come to officers in the middle grades until the oversupply of senior officers was eliminated. Bringing in more outsiders at middle grades would have depressed promotion rates still further.

A more complicated issue was the emphasis on specialization in promotions which was part of the "cone" system. This both predated the Macomber system and continued after the Deputy Under Secretary's departure in 1973. To encourage specialization and relate available competences to needs at each level, the department began in the mid-sixties to manage mid-career promotions so that competition was, to some degree, among officers within particular specialties rather than service-wide. The aim was both to recognize special competence and to relate the number promoted in each specialty from each grade to needs for that specialty at the next higher grade. The rub was that this tended to disadvantage political officers, since they were in oversupply. And political officers were generally considered, and not just



by themselves, as the "best," the essence, the mainstream of the foreign service. When a promotion list in 1971 showed, for example, that only 5.3 percent of political officers were promoted from Class 4 to Class 3 (and only 6.2 percent from 3 to 2);<sup>28</sup> when projections suggested an average wait for all officers of 19 years to get from Class 5 to Class 2;<sup>29</sup> there was a strong reaction. One response to political officer pressure was "interfunctional" promotions -- officers with recent assignments outside of their cone could compete in a group comprising such officers as well as within their cone. And most interfunctional promotions did, apparently, go to political officers. What is perhaps more impressive, however, is that the principle of promotion by specialty has survived such pressures. It even survived secretarial skepticism. Secretary of State Kissinger ordered a study of the cone system because, apparently, he feared it was restricting the rapid movement of the "best" to the top. But he ended up endorsing the Director General's proposal of early 1974 that the system be retained at midcareer, though modified at the recruitment level.<sup>30</sup> One might have expected greater dilution of the cone system from a new Secretary with a view that paralleled that of the political officers; the fact that only moderate change was adopted suggests that functional specialization had become, in State, a generally accepted "fact of life" notwithstanding dissatisfaction with some of its consequences.

What other factors facilitate or inhibit reforms? Impact is likely to be limited when reformers attempt too much, seeking to put across quickly a reform program without clear priorities among its agenda items. The Macomber program was a clear example here. The Herter program, by contrast, was better-structured with clearer priorities; its impact was limited rather because its major proposals failed to win Secretarial and/or Congressional acceptance. Another way reforms can fail is when the apparent consensus behind them dissolves upon their wider exposure, and the spelling out of their implications. "Semi-automatic promotions"

at mid-career (based primarily on seniority in class) were endorsed by three Macomber task forces, but circulation of proposals and projections for partial implementation of such a system brought forth strong reaction from officers who thought the Foreign Service should be competitive, that officers who performed more effectively should be able to rise more rapidly. This reaction was particularly strong because the already-noted combination of an oversupply of senior officers and an oversupply of political officers meant that the rate of advancement for almost all political officers would be very slow. In the end, the idea of semi-automatic promotions was shelved in 1971.<sup>31</sup> It has however, been revived in modified form in 1976.<sup>32</sup>

Another important Macomber program recommendation that was formally implemented was that for a review of position levels in Washington and overseas and their lowering, where possible, in order to facilitate assumption of responsibility by officials earlier in their careers. Though Macomber understandably rejected Task Force I's recommendation that "the largest number of positions in the Service should be at the FSO-6 level,"<sup>33</sup> a survey was quickly carried out by Ambassador (and future Director General) Hall, and a more comprehensive effort followed. And a significant net reduction in position levels did apparently result. Several of those interviewed remembered the exercise with frustration, however, commenting that too often decisions were reached through "bargaining" rather than "objectively" based on job content. The problem, of course, is that embassies and bureaus have stakes in how their positions are graded. This does not, under a rank-in-man system, determine the rank and calibre of the official holding the job, but it influences it -- a good FSO-4 will find a particular position more attractive if it is graded O-3, because this becomes evidence that he is carrying responsibility beyond that typical of his rank. And bureaus become particularly upset when they feel that their positions are being downgraded -- perhaps legitimately on the merits -- but comparable positions elsewhere in the department are not. For they see this as



affecting their ability to compete for talent.

Reform implementation is also adversely affected in the seventies when the steps contemplated are likely to expose officials to charges of inequity, or perhaps even grievance proceedings. This is certainly an important deterrent to those aspects of executive development programs which involve identifying the most capable early in their careers and putting them through particularly demanding training and assignments, since this can be represented as special treatment. It can also affect other reforms. One former PER official interviewed suggested that one reason that the Macomber-approved "more stringent career review or trial period" for just-recruited junior officers (the "junior threshold") was never made a reality was that "people were petrified that somebody might bring a grievance" if he or she were rejected in the review. This may also have been a factor in the failure of the 1974-75 experiment of establishing special panels to interview all FSO-6 officers worldwide and rank them according to their records and their promise. The promotion boards found the panels' evaluations not particularly helpful and disregarded them. The reason, according to a participant, was that due to lack of forceful administration, most threshold review panels fell back on the time-honored practice of "ranking everybody in the top ten percent."

And the problem made itself felt much earlier. The Macomber reform momentum was undercut even as Diplomacy for the 70's was being disseminated by the rise of a whole range of new employee-management-related pressures. By 1971 the American Foreign Service Association was already changing from a professional association to a "union" which bargained forcefully on behalf of its members; in December 1972 it would win an employee election to act as State officials' exclusive bargaining agent. Thus if, when Macomber inaugurated his program in 1970, AFSA was a major, indispensable "inside" supporting constituency, by the time he left his Deputy Under Secretary position in 1973 AFSA had become, on

balance, an obstacle to reform -- because change programs now required extensive labor-management consultations; because these and other consultations demanded so much PER time they fostered neglect of other work; because AFSA was pressed toward representing the average FSO, and hence opposing reforms that might favor the particularly talented and thereby improve State Department performance. Many individual AFSA leaders continued to work for such reforms but their organization's weight was increasingly in the other direction.

Grievance proceedings has a particularly paralyzing impact. In 1971 an officer selected-out from the Service, who had been unable to win a departmental hearing on his case, committed suicide; a memorial fund established in his name took certain departmental personnel procedures to court, with some success. Later that year the long-time Deputy Director-General failed to win Senate confirmation of his ambassadorial appointment because of charges that he had been arbitrary in his treatment of employee grievances. The lesson could hardly have been lost on subsequent PER officials. His successor arrived at his job to find that the first thing that confronted him was an employee grievance; he had no previous experience with such matters, but quickly learned. And before that, in early 1971, Macomber's reform program aide found that his boss was using him more as a labor relations adviser than as a reform implementer.

To some extent, the grievance movement was stimulated by Macomber's own personality and style. He was genuinely sympathetic and responsive to employees who had grievances, while at the same time he was insensitive to the impact of his dispositions of particular grievances on the running of the personnel system more generally. Thus he may have both encouraged the movement and contributed to the organizational complications which it created. At least two officials interviewed, in fact, suggested that this was apiece with Macomber's broader, participatory approach to management which they felt opened up a "Pandora's box"



of employee protests which reached unmanageable proportions. But while Macomber may have, on balance, encouraged the movement, it seems inaccurate to consider him the main cause of its rise to prominence, for the employee rights movement in State paralleled trends in other parts of the government and in American society more generally.

One important conclusion for purposes of this study, however, is that any personnel reform effort today must give explicit, early attention to how it can be made viable in the labor-management as well as the administrative arena. This does not justify what one department official has called "preemptive capitulation," refusing even to consider certain reforms out of fear of employee action. But it does impose an additional constraint which reformers will ignore at their peril.

These examples complicate the earlier analysis that reform failure results particularly from inattention to the implementation stage. But they do not contradict that analysis; rather, they suggest that, in many cases, "implementation" actually involves a continuation of debate about the substance of reforms, and their adjustment to what organizational needs and organizational and labor-management politics will allow. And they therefore underscore the thesis that implemantation is forever, that it requires persistence as well as purpose.

If attention to implementation is so important to achieving reformers' goals, then, why do reformers tend to neglect it?

#### Why Implementation is Neglected

One reason implementation problems are neglected is that, for those genuinely studying what to do about problems, they add further complexity to problems that are already complicated enough. It is enough of a challenge for reformers to decide what sorts of executives and specialists they wish to develop and how the recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and assignment systems could be changed to further this aim, without factoring in such things as the day-to-day pressures on assignments officers and selection boards, or how reforms can be blended into ongoing routines.

And to the degree that the end product of a study is not already fairly well determined by its terms of reference, by orders from those who commission it, and by the choice of who undertakes it, attention to implementation can properly be considered premature -- it logically follows analysis of a problem and decisions as to action on it.

A second reason for neglect is that reformers are often circumscribed in what they can do about implementation. Those preparing a study may be ordered not to focus on implementation until their report is reviewed and decisions taken by departmental leaders. Or a study may be ordered in place of immediate action, with departmental leaders seeing some of its value in deferral and reformers seeing it as an opportunity to develop momentum toward change. "Setting up a commission" is a favorite Washington device for postponing action, or warding off the prospect that someone else less sympathetic will conduct a study. A major impetus for the Macomber program was to preempt a broader review Senator Fulbright was proposing -- which later became the Murphy Commission study. And even if such motivations are not present, those sponsoring or writing reform proposals, or statements of general policy and objectives, will almost certainly have more control over the words in those documents than over the actions that might flow from them. Even Macomber, with formal authority over the offices that would deal with Diplomacy for the Seventies' personnel proposals, came into office after the appointment of Director General Burns, and was neither in a position to push him aside or to exercise full control over who his successor would be. It is therefore understandable that reformers hope that the logic of their proposals will prove persuasive -- especially if adopted on high -- and that their study enterprise can generate a momentum for change which will make more things possible than those focusing on current institutions and power relationships can dream of.

Implementation can also be neglected for a less legitimate reason-- because reformers somehow see it as automatic, something that ought to



follow straightforwardly if they can decide what to do and sell their proposals to top leaders. The very process of analyzing problems can be seductive, leading people to treat institutional problems as susceptible to intellectual solutions, to resolutions by analysis which excludes the implementers.

But the final reason why implementation tends to be neglected -- one which overlaps with some of the above -- is that few officials have very strong stakes in it. Few see their interests served, their careers advanced, their places in history secured, by the actual achievement of enduring institutional change.

The problem begins at the top. Unlike in well-run business enterprises, but like in other executive departments, the senior officials of the State Department seldom give much systematic attention to the development of personnel. They are dominated by "policy"; when they concern themselves with talent, they generally ask who is available today, not how better executives and specialists might be available ten, or five or even two years hence. This gap in attention brought the Herter Committee to propose an Executive Under Secretary of State who would give priority to such matters. And while this proposal proved unacceptable to the Rusk State Department, and may be politically unrealistic more generally (as this author has argued elsewhere),<sup>34</sup> the gap which this official was intended to fill clearly exists.

But the lack of sustained attention to personnel at the top tends to be compounded by the values and assignment patterns of the Foreign Service. Here the State Department does seem different from most other government agencies. While the objectives of executive development and specialization are far more accepted within the service than they were during the Hoover and Wriston days, the system of rotation and the importance of corridor reputation encourage attempts to make a quick, apparent, personal, but usually superficial impact on the part of the organization one is serving. Officers tend to be judged -- and perceive themselves as being judged -- on individual rather than institutional



performance; thus the prevalent style is to give priority to what one can do personally and directly (developing coherent reform proposals) rather than seek broad impact on institutional behavior (reshaping the system over time to implement such proposals). As one senior officer interviewed characterized the typical attitude, "We are responsible only for ourselves." Thus, ironically, the characteristic that reformers seek to modify -- inattention to executive leadership, to development of others, to running large operations -- tends itself to inhibit efforts to change it. A related factor is the perceived need to "move on" from one post to another, avoid getting "typed" too narrowly. Persistence and staying on the job are not thought of as the route to advancement.

Both the neglect of personnel development at the top, and the tendency of the career system not to reward enduring impact on institutions, are reflected in the generally low status of the State Department's personnel shop. With the exception of certain tasks like assignments management (which puts one into regular contact with operating bureaus and offer advantages in arranging one's next post), Personnel is a strong competitor for the distinction of being the departmental unit where FSOs least want to work, which they see as furthest from the road to advancement. Service on a Macomber task force was attractive, but task force chairmen weren't beating down the door to win assignment to senior personnel positions. PER has recently been upgraded to full bureau status; and the establishment of an Office of Program Coordination working for the Director-General has facilitated sustained attention to some of the problems which earlier regimes tackled unsuccessfully. But if "professional development" is now recognized as desirable in the Foreign Service, if some degree of specialization is now considered legitimate and good in officers' careers specialization in professional development is not considered a high-status, worthy preoccupation. Thus PER, in the judgment of many of those interviewed for this study, lacks "professionalism". It is staffed heavily by officers on short single tours of duty with neither prior expertise nor the motivation to develop such expertise. To bring

greater continuity to PER staffing, of course, would not be without its own dangers. It could foster the sort of entrenched interest in the status quo which would thwart future reform efforts, whereas the present situation does offer leaders a certain flexibility if they know what they want -- they can reshuffle people and offices relatively easily, and they frequently do so. But the impact tends to be transitory because the new people and organizational arrangements are not in place long enough, with clear enough purposes, to have the sustained impact required. Movement toward more continuity of staffing is not without risks, but it seems essential if the prospects for sustained attention to reform implementation are to be brightened.

On Doing Better -- Implementation Questions to Address

How more generally can reformers do better? None, of course, have been solely or mainly responsible for the general neglect of implementation described here, nor can any reshape the long-standing values and patterns of the department and Foreign Service which tend to reinforce these patterns of neglect. But reformers can be held accountable for asking the right questions about implementation early enough, and for addressing what leverage they possess to coping with these problems. And "early enough" means from the time a serious reform effort is contemplated.

Implementation problems need to be addressed well before specific proposals are completed and decisions are taken. It is not, of course, possible to develop detailed implementation plans until the specifics of reform proposals are worked out. But once their general direction is clear, once it is known what departmental activities are likely to be the subjects of reform initiatives -- and this is usually known very early -- reformers need to turn part of their attention to preparing the way for reform execution, particularly by engineering the placement of sympathizers in key positions and/or engaging the constructive involvement of those already there. In any case, implementing offices must not simply be thought of as



on the "receiving end," the targets for directives after others decide what needs doing.

The fundamental implementation question is an obvious one -- whose behavior must change if a reform is to succeed? What are the day-to-day "worlds" in which these people operate, and how can proposed reforms be made to relate to these worlds? Can the desired changes in behavior be achieved by binding rules and guidelines, or is it rather a question of how assignments officers, selection boards, supervisors, or key executives exercise their discretionary power? If the former, an authoritarian, Wriston-type approach is likely to work; if not, the constructive participation of a range of officials must be engaged. How can this be accomplished? What ways can operators be brought to participate in shaping proposed changes, so they can share reform objectives and share responsibility and credit for their realization, without inviting either excessive delay or the minimal changes that some operators may prefer? How can executives and staff analysts develop a feel and a sympathy for the world of middle-level operations, and shape reforms to relate to this world?

If, as argued here, implementation of particular reforms is found to require continuity of staffing, a "critical mass" of people engaged over a substantial period of time, what can be done to make it more in officials' interests to become so engaged? How can the rewards for superficial impact be diminished and the reward for sticking with the job, achieving real institutional change, increased? One indispensable means is to give greater attention to defining objectives and shaping implementation programs in ways that progress can be measured, and thus monitored. This is not, of course, as easy done as said. But without general bases for judging how much institutional practice is changing, it is hard to see how credit for achieving such change can compete with credit for advocating it (or for pretending it has been achieved).<sup>35</sup> When a Macomber aide expressed concern, in a memo dated July 1971, that "we have not yet established criteria for evaluation" of progress under



the Management Reform Program, he presumably meant that, from Macomber's vantagepoint, it would be difficult to distinguish paper compliance from serious effort and real results. But from the vantagepoint of the implementers in PER, the lack of such criteria also reduced the potential positive incentives for change, since it was harder for them to establish that their implementation efforts were making a real difference.

Finally, a different set of implementation questions should be asked about the "markets" for the services to be reformed. If the aim is development of specialists, what competences do assistant secretaries and bureau executive directors feel their operations most need and lack? While the sum of their perceived needs may not equal the total of the department's actual specialist requirements (their perceptions may be part of the problem), a personnel development program conspicuously responding to urgent bureau priorities might broaden its support base thereby. Similarly, if regional bureaus see the lack of prior supervisory experience among DCMs as a very serious problem for them (the bureaus), then they might be brought to support a strong program of assigning promising officers to supervisory jobs earlier, even perhaps restructuring Embassy and Washington operations to increase the number of such positions. Inevitably, relations between PER and the bureaus it both directs and serves will be a mixture of conflict and cooperation -- the problem is to strengthen the cooperative element to build shared interests in professional development systems so that they will survive organizationally and provide a foundation for further reforms.

It is something of an anticlimax to end a paper with a series of questions. But it is nonetheless an appropriate conclusion. For to the degree that implementation problems are resolvable -- and certainly not all will prove to be -- they can best be approached not with a set of pre-cooked answers but with an orientation focused on end results in terms of institutional change. If inattention to implementation is a cause for disappointment in reform results, then attention to questions such as

these, early enough, is the appropriate prescription. It remains important for reformers to ask what needs to be done. But it is even more important for them to focus, early enough, on how the living, operating systems inside the State Department can be brought, over time, to do it.

## Footnotes

1. William B. Macomber, "Management Strategy: A Program for the Seventies," Address at the Department of State, January 14, 1970, reprinted in Department of State, Diplomacy for the 70's, December 1970, pp 595-96.
2. "A Schedule for Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of State Task Forces on Management Reform," Department of State Newsletter, January 1971, esp. p. 26 (recommendations 118-28).
3. State Department personnel policy documents.
4. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Department of State and the Foreign Service," address at the Swearing-In Ceremony of the 119th Foreign Service Officer Class, June 27, 1975, p. 4.
5. Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (Murphy Commission), Report, June 1975, p. 174. The Murphy Commission's personnel recommendations draw mainly on James W. Clark, "Foreign Affairs Personnel Management," Murphy Commission, Appendices, Volume 6, pp. 178-222.
6. William T. McDonald, "The Case of the Wriston Committee," in National Academy of Public Administration, Making Organizational Change Effective: Case Studies of Attempted Reforms in Foreign Affairs, Murphy Commission, Appendices, Volume 6, 1976, p. 45.
7. Personnel for the New Diplomacy, Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Personnel, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 1962, esp. pp. 52, 83, 87-88.
8. See Department of State, A Management Program for the Department of State, 1966.
9. Toward a Stronger Foreign Service, Report of the Secretary of State's Public Committee on Personnel, June 1954, pp. 13-14.
10. Ibid., p. 14. This was of course accomplished through what became known as "Wristonization." But it did not immediately increase State's specialist competence. Indeed, McDonald concludes that "the net number of available specialists was actually reduced" because those Wristonized were mainly already in the system, and many were "transferred to overseas posts which did not utilize their strongest



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- skills." ("The Case of the Wriston Committee," p. 49.)
11. Toward a Stronger Foreign Service, p. 43.
  12. Personnel for the New Diplomacy, esp. pp. 53-55, 84-85, 67-71, 75.
  13. "Management Strategy: Program for the Seventies," p. 590 in Diplomacy for the 70's, "Summary Report, pp. 19-21, and Report of Task Force I, pp. 41-42, ibid.
  14. Murphy Commission, Report, pp. 167-68.
  15. McDonald, "Case of the Wriston Committee," p. 47.
  16. The frequent analyses of the Macomber program in this paper draw upon: the published record; twelve interviews conducted specifically for this study and several others during a 1970-1971 research effort; State Department files; and William I. Bacchus, "Diplomacy for the 70's: An Afterview and Appraisal," American Political Science Review, June 1974, pp. 736-48. Additional citations will be made only where they provide further specific illumination to the reader.
  17. William T. McDonald, "The Case of the Herter Committee, 1961-62," in National Academy of Public Administration, Making Organizational Change Effective, Murphy Commission, Appendices, Volume 6, p. 53.
  18. Ibid.
  19. Diplomacy for the 70's, pp. 38-46.
  20. "Centralization and Reorganization of Personnel Programs," State Department Management Reform Bulletin No. 5 (one of a series issued by Macomber's office), January 11, 1971.
  21. Kissinger, "Department of State and Foreign Service," June 27, 1975, p. 4.
  22. Bureau executive directors interviewed gave examples of how PER officials had used the new system to try to force on them FSOs who were unqualified for particular positions. One would expect, of course, that executive directors would be cool toward the new system; more revealing was the criticism levied by a central department management official whose position inclined him to support centralization of assignments. He felt that the PER assignments shop was sometimes taking the attitude of "we've got the power now, more than ever

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before, so to Hell with the bureaus," and contrasted this with the two-way communication he felt was essential.

23. The reform implementation schedule established in December 1970 declared that "careful testing of new forms and concepts will begin immediately, with continuing advice from business and academic experts in the field of performance appraisal. General installation of the new system should be accomplished by FY-1972." ( Department of State Newsletter, January 1971, p. 23.) See also report of Task Force II, Diplomacy for the 70s, pp. 56-57, 73-78, 85-91.
24. See Foreign Affairs Manual Circular 680, July 11, 1974, establishing a new Officer Evaluation Report, Form DS-1731. Management Reform Bulletin No. 19 of June 1, 1971, "Performance Evaluation: A Changing Approach," tacitly acknowledges the failure to meet the Macomber program schedule. Interestingly, the form the program sought to change--JF-41--had only been in use since April 1969, and was in fact a substantial step in directions reformers desired--it "suggested" that "as an aid in preparing the report," the rated officer be invited "to prepare a statement outlining his work goals, problems, and achievements during the rating period"; it was required that the rater "state the frequency and content of discussions" with the rated officer during the rating period; and raters were cautioned to "comment only on those [personal] characteristics which have real significance for the officer's performance." (See Foreign Affairs Manual Circular 524, April 21, 1969, and attachments.) Interesting also is that fact that this prior progress was not acknowledged in either the report of Task Force II or any of the implementation plans and reports which followed.
25. PER officials did serve as executive secretaries and resource persons for the Macomber task forces dealing with personnel issues. But the chairmen and other members were designedly chosen from outside PER. This contributed to creativity and freshness of approach at the cost of some resentment in PER and a more general lack of identification

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with the program among those would implement it. Obviously a basic "trade-off" is involved here; if operators had dominated the Task Forces, much less reform would likely have been proposed. But hindsight suggests that more of them should have been included; strong leadership from Macomber and the Task Force Chairmen would propably have sufficed to maintain the basically reformist orientation of the Task Forces.

26. Diplomacy for the 70s, p. 113.
27. Ibid., pp. 10, 286-89, 325, 394.
28. Department of State Newsletter, p. 40.
29. "Proposed Changes in FSO Promotion, Selection-out and Performance Evaluation Systems," a draft outline circulated widely inside the Department by the Office of the Director General, April 19, 1971, TAB B.
30. A published version of the "Cone System Study Report" appears in Department of State Newsletter, July 1974, pp 64-67. Departmental files suggest that it was submitted to the Secretary in essentially the same form several months earlier.
31. "Proposed Changes in FSO Promotion" of April 1971 (fn.29) provided for promotion strictly by seniority from Class 5 to Class 4 (excepting the "top 5%", who would rise more quickly). But Management Reform Bulletin No. 27 of July 6, 1971, "Promotion Reform: Threshold Review and Mid-Career Tenure," did not include this reform.
32. On April 9, 1976, State Department management unveiled plans for a "zone-merit system" to provide for "a more predictable promotion pattern" in the middle Foreign Service grades. See AFSA News, No. 76/10, April 15, 1976, "New Management Proposals on State Foreign Service Officer Promotions."
33. Diplomacy for the 70s, p. 36.
34. I. M. Destler, Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy, Princeton University Press, 1972 and 1974, pp. 27-28.



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35. Lacking such general direct measures, this paper has drawn on indirect measures in assessing reform impact, particularly the judgements of those involved (and of subsequent individuals or groups reviewing the same problems). The cost is inevitably to render the analyses herein more subjective, more dependent on the researcher's qualitative weighing of the evidence. In the absence of accepted, workable measures of implementation, officials must do likewise, and their evaluations will inevitably be colored by their own vantagepoints, values, etc. They will be more likely to disagree on the empirical question of whether a reform has achieved what it set out to achieve. This will dilute the recognition, the reward, that effective implementers might receive, and thus their incentive to be serious about achieving real results. But having highlighted this predicament this researcher has unhappily been unable to resolve it -- asserting that objective criteria for achievement need to be developed does not assure that they will of even can be developed.